

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 02503 01 OF 02 160623Z

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 DHA-02 SY-05
A-01 OPR-02 SCA-01 OC-06 CCO-00 AID-05 SCS-03 /083 W
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 348

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY

AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY

AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 2503

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y T E X T

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: BHUTTO/PNA CONFRONTATION CONTINUES

SUMMARY: THE PNA PLAN TO LEAD SMALL-SCALE ANTI-GOVERNMENT
PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS ON MARCH 15 WAS GENERALLY SUCCESSFUL.
IN KARACHI, ABOUT THREE TO FOUR THOUSAND SUPPORTERS GATHERED
IN THE OLD CITY AND WERE EVENTUALLY DISPERSED BY THE POLICE
USING LATHIS AND TEAR GAS. IN PINDI, THE PROCESSION BECAME
UNRULY AND SEVERAL PNA LEADERS WERE DETAINED AND LATER
RELEASED. IN PESHAWAR, BEGUM WALI KHAN AND MUFTI MAHMUD
WERE ALSO TEMPORARILY DETAINED, WHILE IN LAHORE THE ASGHAR
KHAN LED PROCESSION WAS PEACEFUL AND MERELY MONITORED BY
THE POLICE.

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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 02503 01 OF 02 160623Z

THE GOP'S TACTIC HAS BEEN TO AVOID OVER-REACTION, NOT
INCARCERATE THE PNA LEADERSHIP, ARREST LOWER LEVEL
WORKERS AND ATTEMPT TO DIVIDE THE PNA LEADERS. THE
OPPOSITION, SATISFIED WITH THE FIRST DAY RESPONSE TO
ITS CALL FOR PROCESSIONS, WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE THE
PRESENT STRATEGY, HOPE FOR A GRADUAL DECLINE IN THE

GOVERNMENT'S AUTHORITY, AND AN EVENTUAL MILITARY TAKE-OVER LEADING TO NEW ELECTIONS AND A PNA VICTORY. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO PREDICT WHAT WILL HAPPEN.

BOTH CBS NEWS AND THE NYTIMES CORRESPONDENTS PLAN TO REMAIN IN PAKISTAN FOR SEVERAL DAYS COVERING THE PNA/BHUTTO CONFRONTATION. THEY BOTH BELIEVE IT IS AN INTERESTING STORY, AND CBS CORRESPONDENT TELLS US HIS FILM OF KARACHI DEMONSTRATION WILL BE ON MARCH 15 CBS EVENING NEWS SHOW. END SUMMARY.

1. THE PNA STRATEGY OF LEADING SMALL-SCALE ANTI-GOVERNMENT MEETINGS AND PROCESSIONS ON MARCH 14 IN VIOLATION OF SECTION 144 IN PAKISTAN'S MAIN CITIES WAS GENERALLY SUCCESSFUL. PREDICTABLY, THE BEST RESPONSE WAS IN KARACHI, BUT THE PNA PROVED IT IS ABLE TO MUSTER RESPECTABLE SUPPORT IN LAHORE, PINDI AND PESHAWAR AND OTHER SMALLER CITIES AS WELL. BOTH THE NYTIMES AND CBS NEWS COVERED THE KARACHI PROCESSION AND THEIR REPS PLAN TO REMAIN IN PAKISTAN FOR SEVERAL DAYS TO SEE HOW THE STORY EVOLVES.

2. IN KARACHI, THE PROCESSION WAS TO BEGIN FROM EMPRESS MARKET AND, ACCORDING TO CBS CORRESPONDENT PETER COLLINS, ABOUT 3,000-4,000 PNA SUPPORTERS, WITH ABOUT 10-15,000 ONLOOKERS, GATHERED IN THE MARKET AREA FOLLOWING AFTERNOON PRAYERS. PNA LEADERS SHERBAZ MAZAR AND PROFESSOR GHAFOR TRIED TO REACH THE MARKET AREA BUT THEIR JEEP WAS TEAR-GASSED AND THEY TOOK REFUGE IN A NEARBY HOUSE. AFTER BEING ORDERED TO DISPERSE BY THE MAGISTRATE, AND REFUSING, CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 02503 01 OF 02 160623Z

THE CROWD WAS LATHI CHARGED BY THE POLICE. TEAR GAS WAS ALSO USED. THE ARMY LATER APPEARED ON THE SCENE AND WAS CHEERED BY THE CROWD, BUT DID NOT INTERVENE. IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY PNA LEADERSHIP, THE GATHERING EVENTUALLY DISPERSED, BUT ONLY AFTER FIVE-SIX HOURS OF CLASHES. WE UNDERSTAND NUMEROUS PARTY WORKERS WERE ARRESTED.

3. IN LAHORE, THE PROCESSION STARTED FROM A MOSQUE ABOUT 500 YARDS FROM THE CENTRAL BANK SQUARE. ASGHAR KHAN AND SEVERAL OTHER PNA LEADERS LEFT THE MOSQUE, HOLDING COPIES OF THE KORAN. ACCORDING TO VARIOUS REPORTS, THEY ASKED THE CROWD WAITING FOR THEM, STIMATED AT FROM 6-30 THOUSAND, TO DISPERSE, THE CROWD REFUSED AND THE PNA LEADERS LED A PROCESSION TO BANK SQUARE. ACCORDING TO PETER GILL OF THE DAILY TELEGRAPH, AND A LATER PUNJAB GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASE, THE POLICE TOOK THE UNUSUAL POSITION OF CLAIMING THE PROCESSION WAS NOT IN VIOLATION OF SECTION 144, SINCE THE PNA LEADERSHIP HAD ENCOURAGED THEIR FOLLOWERS NOT TO MARCH. ASGHAR KHAN

TOLD GILL HE WAS COURTING ARREST AND HAD HOPED TO BE
DETAINED BY THE POLICE. THE AUTHORITIES, HOWEVER, REFUSED
TO INTERVENE, WERE GENERALLY GOOD HUMORED, AND MERELY
MONITORED THE PROCESSION ROUTE. AFTER HE AND OTHER
LEADERS ADDRESSED THEIR FOLLOWERS SEVERAL TIMES, ASGHAR
KHAN LEFT THE PROCESSION AND THE CROWD PEACEFULLY DISPERSED.

4. THE PROCESSION BECAME UNRULY IN RAWALPINDI WHEN FOLLOWING
AFTERNOON PRAYERS ABOUT 500-600 PNA SUPPORTERS, LED BY
SEVERAL PNA LEADERS INCLUDING FORMER MNA MAHMUD ALI KASURI,
MARCHED THROUGH RAJA BAZAAR IN THE OLD CITY. A BUS WAS
BURNED ON MURREE ROAD AND THE POLICE LED SEVERAL LATHI
CHARGES EVENTUALLY FORCING THE CROWD IN THE BAZAAR TO
DISPERSE. THE PNA LEADERS, INCLUDING KASURI, WERE DETAINED
FOR SEVERAL HOURS AND THEN RELEASED.

5. IN THE FRONTIER, MUFTI MAHMUD AND BEGUM WALI KHAN
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PAGE 04 ISLAMA 02503 01 OF 02 160623Z

LED A DEMONSTRATION IN THE HEART OF PESHAWAR'S OLD CITY.
ACCORDING TO CONSUL PESHAWAR, ALTHOUGH THIER FOLLOWING
WAS VOCAL AND CALLED FOR ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIONS,
BEGUM WALI URGED THEM TO REMAIN CALM. BOTH SHE AND
MUFTI WERE PICKED UP BY THE POLICE, HELD FOR TWO HOURS,

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 02503 02 OF 02 160628Z
ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 2503

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y T E X T

THEN RELEASED. ACCORDING TO COLLINS, MUFTI LATER CALLED MAZARI AND TOLD HIM BOTH HE AND BEGUM WALI WERE TREATED WELL, GIVEN TEA AND NOT HARASSED. BEGUM WALI GAVE SAME INFORMATION TO CONSUL PESHAWAR DURING FORTUITOUS MEETING ON PLANE TO PINDI.

NAWA-I-WAQT REPORTED THAT PROCESSIONS WERE TAKEN OUT IN NUMEROUS OTHER LOCATIONS IN THE COUNTRY INCLUDING A LARGE NUMBER OF TOWNS IN THE FRONTIER AND ALSO LYALLPUR AND MULTAN. CONGEN LAHORE NOTES THAT CLASHES WERE ALSO REPORTED IN SARGODHA AND SIALKOT. REPORTEDLY, THE POLICE RESORTED TO LATHI CHARGES AND TEAR GAS TO BREAK UP MOST OF THESE DEMONSTRATIONS.

6. THE GOP'S REACTION TO THE FIRST DAY OF THE PNA'S NEW ANTI-GOVERNMENT STRATEGY WAS MIXED. PNA LEADERS IN PINDI AND PESHAWAR WERE DETAINED FOR SEVERAL HOURS THEN RELEASED. IN LAHORE, THE POLICE WERE REPORTEDLY AFFABLE, CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 02503 02 OF 02 160628Z

THE ADMINISTRATION TOOK A DISTINCTLY LOW-PROFILE AND DID NOT INTERFERE WITH THE PROCESSION. A KARACHI MAGISTRATE TOLD COLLINS THAT HE HAD ORDERS FROM THE CENTER TO STRICTLY ENFORCE SECTION 144 AND THE POLICE CONSEQUENTLY BROKE UP THE GATHERING AT EMPRESS MARKET. WHILE THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN CAREFUL NOT TO INCARCERATE (BEYOND A FEW HOURS) THE PRINCIPAL PNA LEADERS, ITS CAMPAIGN OF DETAINING LOWER LEVEL WORKERS, AS REPORTED EARLIER, CONTINUES. WE HAVE RECEIVED REPORTS OF ORDERS GOING TO THE POLICE IN THE FRONTIER TO ARREST A NUMBER OF PNA WORKERS, AND ARRESTS ARE REPORTEDLY CONTINUING IN KARACHI.

7. THE GOVERNMENT'S TACTIC SO FAR SEEMS TO BE TO AVOID OVER-REACTION, LETTING THE PNA LEADERSHIP REMAIN FREE SO IT CANNOT CLAIM ANY JAILED LEADERS (ALWAYS A POTENTIALLY POWERFUL POLITICAL CREDENTIAL IN THE SUBCONTINENT), AND CONTINUING TO PICK UP THE MIDDLE AND LOWER LEVEL WORKERS WHO SUPPLY THE BACKBONE OF THE ALLIANCE'S ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITIES. THE GOP UNDOUBTEDLY HOPES THAT AS TIME GOES BY, THE PROTEST MOVEMENT WILL LOSE ITS STEAM, PEOPLE WILL BECOME DISENCHANGED AND UNINTERESTED, AND NORMALCY WILL RETURN. BHUTTO ALSO PROBABLY HOPES, AS HE HAS DONE IN THE PAST, TO ENTICE ONE OR SEVERAL OPPOSITION LEADERS

INTO HAVING DISCUSSIONS WITH HIM AND PERHAPS EVENING JOINING THE PPP CAMP. THE OPPOSITION OBVIOUSLY FEARS SUCH AN EVENTUALITY AND RUMORS THAT PNA NATIONAL SECRETARY GENERAL BAJWA HAS MET WITH BHUTTO (VEHEMENTLY DENIED BY BAJWA) CAUSED CONSTERNATION IN THE PNA CAMP.

8. ACCORDING TO COLLINS, MUFTI MAHMUD TOLD MAZARI THAT HE WAS SATISFIED WITH THE RESULTS OF THE FIRST DAY'S TACTICS, AND WAS ENCOURAGED TO CONTINUE THE SAME STRATEGY AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. MUFTI HAS ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT THE PNA LEADERSHIP HAS DECIDED TO REJECT BHUTTO'S LETTER IN WHICH HE OFFERED TO OPEN A DIALOGUE, AND WILL
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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 02503 02 OF 02 160628Z

CONTINUE ITS TACTICS TO HAVE ITS DEMANDS FOR THE REMOVAL OF THE GOVERNMENT AND NEW ELECTIONS ACCEPTED. WE UNDERSTAND THAT MUFTI HAS CALLED FOR A MEETING OF THE PNA LEADERSHIP IN LAHORE TODAY TO DISCUSS WHAT FURTHER STEPS THE ALLIANCE SHOULD TAKE. THE OPPOSITION HAS SCHEDULED FURTHER PROCESSIONS FOR KARACHI AT 4:00 AND PINDI AT 4:30 TODAY. THEY HAVE ALSO ANNOUNCED ANOTHER MARCH IN LAHORE FOR TODAY. ENGLISH LANGUAGE DAWN REPORTS THAT THE PNA IS FORMING GROUPS OF WOMEN AND TEENAGERS TO TAKE OUT PROCESSIONS AND COURT ARREST.

9. WE ASSUME THE PNA WILL CONTINUE ITS COURSE OF TAKING OUT PROCESSIONS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT, HOPEING TO CAUSE STEADY EROSION IN THE GOP'S AUTHORITY, AND EVENTUALLY PRECIPITATING A DECLINE IN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO HANDLE THE SECURITY SITUATION. PNA PROBABLY ENVISAGES SCENARIO IN WHICH THE MILITARY WILL EVENTUALLY TAKE OVER, REMOVE BHUTTO, AND HOLD NEW ELECTIONS RESULTING IN THE OPPOSITION ASSUMING THE REINS OF POWER. REGARDLESS OF WHOSE STRATEGY IS EVENTUALLY SUCCESSFUL, BHUTTO'S OR THE OPPOSITION'S, WE DO NOT EXPECT AN IMMEDIATE DENOUNCEMENT. BOTH STRATEGIES PRESUPPOSE SEVERAL WEEKS PASSING BEFORE IT BECOMES EVIDENT WHETHER THE OPPOSITION CAN CARRY THE DAY AND ENGENDER THE PM'S DOWNFALL. IT IS THEREFORE, STILL TOO EARLY TO PREDICT THE EVENTUAL OUTCOME.

10. AMERICAN NEWS MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES IN PAKISTAN BELIEVE THEY HAVE A CONTINUING STORY AND PLAN TO REMAIN IN COUNTRY FOR SEVERAL DAYS. PETER COLLINS SAYS HE FILMED STORY ON THE KARACHI DEMONSTRATION WHICH WILL BE SHOWN ON MARCH 15 WALTER CRONKITE SHOW. HE TOLD EMBOFF THAT EVEN IF HE GOES TO INDIA TO COVER ELECTIONS THERE, CBS WILL PROBABLY SEND SOMEONE TO PAKISTAN TO TAKE HIS PLACE TO CONTINUE REPORTING ON THE MOVEMENT AGAINST BHUTTO. HENRY KAMM OF THE NY TIMES HAS ALSO TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE WILL BE STAYING IN PAKISTAN FOR SEVERAL DAYS, RATHER THAN GO TO INDIA TO

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PAGE 04 ISLAMA 02503 02 OF 02 160628Z

SUPPLEMENT THE TIMES' COVERAGE ON ELECTIONS THERE. KAMM HAS TOLD HIS FOREIGN EDITOR THAT HE THINKS THERE IS A STORY WORTH FOLLOWING IN THE PNA'S EFFORTS. BOTH COLLINS AND KAMM PLAN TO SPEND MOST OF THEIR TIME IN KARACHI WHERE THEY EXPECT THE MAJOR ACTION TO TAKE PLACE. KAMM HAS BEEN MAKING SIDE TRIPS TO ISLAMABAD HOWEVER, AND IS IN TOUCH WITH EMBOFFS.

11. BOTH COLLINS AND KAMM HAVE SAID THEY ARE BEING TREATED WELL BY GOP AUTHORITIES AND HAVE NOT BEEN HARRASSED. COLLINS CONTEDED THAT FILM HE TRIED TO SEND OUT ON THE 13TH "DISAPPEARED" AT THE AIRPORT, BUT HE HOPES THIS WILL NOT HAPPEN AGAIN. IT SEEMS, FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS AT LEAST, THAT WE CAN EXPECT PAKISTAN TO REMAIN UNDER THE CLOSE SCRUTINY OF THE AMERICAN PRESS.
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Message Attributes

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